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# LINCOLN DAY ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

DANIEL W. LAWLER

At a meeting held under the auspices of St. Paul Camp, No. 1,  
Sons of Veterans, at Assembly Hall, Old State Capitol, Minnesota,  
February 12th, 1907.



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**Lincoln Day Address delivered by Daniel W. Lawler at a meeting held under the auspices of St. Paul Camp No. 1, Sons of Veterans, at Assembly Hall, Old State Capitol, St. Paul, Minnesota, February 12th, 1907.**

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On being introduced by the Presiding Officer, Mr. Lawler spoke as follows:

Mr. Chairman, Members of St. Paul Camp No. 1, Sons of Veterans, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Honored as we are tonight by the presence of so many of the veteran soldiers of the Union Army, I feel that much I may say during the time that has been allotted to me, may seem trite and elementary. At a meeting held, however, under the auspices of the Sons of Veterans it may not be inappropriate for us to first review some of the conditions which confronted the generation to which belonged the man whose memory we honor tonight. It is difficult for us of this generation to fully appreciate the political conditions which existed in this country and the dangers that confronted the Republic when Fort Sumter was fired upon. Living, as we are today, in the full enjoyment of the blessings which the victory of the Union arms won for us and all the generations to come, we are perhaps too apt to take for granted that the principles of government which exist today were those of our predecessors; we are too apt to forget that the political doctrines which we hold relating to the dignity of humanity, the rights of men, the powers of government, which were won for us as a precious legacy by the men who fought for the cause of the Union were not accepted by the entire people of this country in 1861. Slavery was, of course, the provoking cause of the war. Its immediate cause was the vexed question of the extension of slavery. What was the condition that confronted the men who were at the

helm of state on that fateful day in Spring when the news was flashed throughout the nation that the hand of treason had been raised against the flag and that the guns of the Confederacy had thundered against the walls of Sumter?

### Conditions in the Spring of 1861.

Slavery was an old issue, not only in this land of ours but in every land where civilization had had its sway. No government had ever existed, from the commencement of civilization, that had not at some time or other in its history stamped with the brand of legality the institution of slavery. Some of the strongest, and, on their surface, most plausible and convincing, arguments in behalf of slavery were drawn with all honesty and sincerity by many of its advocates from the pages of Holy Writ itself. Only twenty-two years had elapsed when Sumter was fired upon since emancipation had been established by law in the British Empire. We of today know from our childhood the celebrated expression attributed to Lord Mansfield, that "the air of England is too pure for a slave to breathe." But that legal opinion was rendered in 1722 when there were twenty thousand black slaves living within the limits of England. From the very commencement of the colonization of North America slavery had been a legally recognized institution, largely forced upon the colonists by the government of Great Britain. One of the counts in the indictment which was preferred by the people of the colonies against the British Parliament and against the British Government was that when the people of the southern colonies endeavored to do away with slavery, they were prevented by the strong hand of imperial law from carrying out their wishes. The people of all the sections, both north and south, were historically responsible for slavery. It thrived in the South largely on account of climatic conditions. For the same reason it was a failure in the colonies and the states of the North. But the commercial interests of the North profited by slavery in the early

days of our history, because it encouraged their shipping interest, because people of that section engaged in the slave trade, and in the latter days of slavery because from the great manufacturing cities of the North went to the fields of the South and to the plantations of the Southern planter the articles which were manufactured north of Mason and Dixon's line. The constitution itself was a compromise upon the question of slavery, and an implicit admission that it had a legal existence. Although it did not thrive at the North, it was not until the fourth of July, 1827, until after the second quarter of the nineteenth century had commenced, that the great state of New York, the Empire State then and now of the United States, by a legal enactment emancipated the slaves within its borders. Slavery had been a burning subject of discussion, from the formation of the constitution. It had made and unmade the fortunes of statesmen and had directed the careers of political parties. The people of the North were numerically superior to the people of the South; but the people of the North were a commercial and an industrial people, not given to military habits nor enamoured of the ways of war. Slavery, by its very constitution and training, made the slave-holder a leader on the field of battle and a leader on the field of civil strife. Not only at the commencement of the Civil War were the great generals enrolled in the armies of the South, but from the time when the constitution itself was enacted, until the commencement of the Civil War, the South had trained year in and year out an army of professional statesmen, educated, cultured, with high ideals of what they considered personal honor, quick to avenge an insult to themselves or to their section, and devoted to the death to their peculiar institution of slavery. They were a solid South so far as slavery was concerned, and the North was hopelessly divided in opinions and in beliefs on that important question. No later than 1850, only eleven years before the war broke out, Daniel Webster, in his celebrated seventh of March speech in behalf

of the compromise measures agreed upon by himself and Henry Clay, in an address, which was by many thought to mark the end of his career in obloquy and disgrace, historically and legally justified the existence of slavery. The sentiments of the governments of the Old World and particularly of those two great governments which then dominated the politics of Europe, England and France, were in favor of slavery and were opposed to the cause of liberty. Within three months after Sumter was fired upon,—before Charles Francis Adams, the newly appointed Minister to Great Britain, was able to reach London, England and France, acting in concert, and with indecent haste, with a brutality that would have been exercised towards no nation except one that was considered weak and defenseless, recognized in solemn proclamations the belligerency of the Confederate States. Commencing immediately after the National election held in November, 1860, and using the result of that election as a pretext State after State in the South passed the Ordinance of Secession,—the federal navy yards, forts and munitions of war within their borders were seized by the rebellious government without even a protest from the Buchanan administration,—open and avowed treason and resistance to the national government were preached by Northern sympathizers with the South,—doubt, uncertainty and discord pervaded the minds even of loyal men in the North,—the national treasury was empty, the national credit gone,—under the leadership of brilliant and experienced generals trained at West Point and wearing laurels from the battle fields of Mexico, the mighty army of rebellion stood ready for the onset while the sneering and hostile world of English and Continental officialdom in gleeful expectation awaited the speedy submission or annihilation of the Republic of Washington now confided to the keeping of the “northern mudsill.” These were the conditions that existed in the spring of 1861. If ever there was a time when any nation needed a great leader, if there was ever a juncture

in the history of this beloved land of ours when for a moment the very face of God seemed to be averted from this people, it was during the dark days of March, April and May in 1861.

### The Leader.

Whence, my friends, came the leader? Whence came the man of the hour? Was it from the ranks of the great and cultured? Was it from the abode of those whom men call great? Was he selected from the ranks of trained statesmen? Was he a man skilled in the culture and teachings of the schools? Was he endowed with the graces of courts and of camps? Was it William H. Seward, governor and United States senator from New York? Was it the courtly, wise and eloquent Salmon P. Chase, governor of Ohio? Was it the leader of the Northern Democracy, Stephen A. Douglas? No, it was none of these. Wait a moment and I will tell you who it was. Thirty years before Sumter was fired upon, two men, of strange and picturesque appearance, stood in the slave market of New Orleans. By their dress and appearance it was evident that they had come from the very borders of civilization. The younger of the two, then twenty-two years of age, stood as a giant among men, six feet four in height, straight as the pines of our northern state, with flashing black eye, coarse black hair, clad in habiliments that told of a semi-civilization almost on the limits of barbarism. As they stood there the human chattels whom God had made black, were led out and auctioned in that mart of human bodies. A mulatto girl was put upon the block. She was turned and pinched and examined in order that none of her qualifications might be lost to the anxious and competing bidders. She was sold. And as these two men walked away, one said to the other, "My God, if I ever get a chance to hit that institution, I'll hit it hard!" (Applause.) The words which he uttered were a prayer not an imprecation. Thirty

years rolled around before they were heard, but then they pierced to the shining throne of Grace, and from the prairies of Illinois was summoned the man who spoke them and he hit the institution hard—for his name was Abraham Lincoln! (Applause).

Today in every land of civilization the name of Abraham Lincoln is spoken. Where are your great men, his contemporaries, his opponents, his colleagues? Webster and Douglas and Everett, and Chase, did well their work, and as long as this government of ours shall endure, their names shall be mentioned with gratitude and reverence. Lord John Russell, Premier of the Great Brita'n of that day, has passed to a merited obscurity. Napoleon III, emperor of France, and Russell's accomplice, found his proper ending when his flag went down in defeat upon the battlefield of Gravelotte and he disgraced the name he bore when from behind the walls of Sedan he raised the white flag of surrender before the conquering legions of Germany. But today, not only in this great republic, but wherever men and women of any land or of any color gather together, wherever there is a heart which beats responsive to the noblest dictates of humanity, there is named with reverence and love the name of Abraham Lincoln. (Applause). It would seem appropriate on an occasion like this, my friends, to review briefly and succinctly some of the reasons why Lincoln is great and why he succeeded in the great task which was assigned to him. This is Lincoln's day. Twelve of the states of these United States have set this day apart, and the reason why it has been made a legal holiday is that we may recall the traits and deeds of Abraham Lincoln. For my part, I believe that it will be more satisfactory to this intelligent audience if we speak tonight something about Lincoln, rather than if I were to seize upon this opportunity as a pretext for inflicting upon the audience my own notions, which must be of very little importance, upon any of the questions of the day.

### A Divinely-Chosen Leader.

The distinguishing mark of Lincoln's character, the beacon light of his career, it seems to me, is that he was a divinely-chosen leader. I am old-fashioned enough, and I love to believe that there are still many of the old-fashioned kind who also believe that there is a God who directs the destinies not only of men but the destinies of nations. It was He who called Abraham Lincoln, even as centuries upon centuries before He called the young shepherd from the hills and rocks of Palestine to put aside the cloak of armor in which he had been invested and the helmet which Saul had put upon his head and go forth armed only with staff and shepherd's sling to face the army of the Philistines and bid defiance to its champion, "In the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, which thou hast defied." Abraham Lincoln was as surely called by Him who rules above, from his place among the lowly, as was David in the days of Scripture. He was a plain uncourtly man, without distinguished ancestry, trained in none of the graces of the schools, unable to write behind his name the mystical letters which denote the learned degrees of academy and of college; but, my friends, it was with such men, it was by the instrumentality of the plain common men of this people, that the great cause of Union and liberty was won. In the dark days of the Rebellion, it was a man who would be out of place on the waxed floor of a ball-room who thundered on the awful field of Shiloh, who, during the Battle of the Wilderness, from the smoke and dust of war's arena, announced it his intention to "fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." It was no prince of high degree, but it was the tanner of Galena that received from the knightly hand of Lee the surrendered sword of the Confederacy. William Tecumseh Sherman would not have embellished a court of Europe; he would not have been able perhaps to excell in some of the graces with which our ambassadors of today are popularly supposed to be supplied, but the swing of his majestic army carried the flag in victory

"from Atlanta to the sea," and the people of this land were willing to receive victory from a plain, homely man of the people of America. (Applause.)

Philip Henry Sheridan, the son of an Irish immigrant, had little of the veneer or polish of our modern civilization, and he was covered with the unlovely dust and sweat of war when from "Winchester forty miles away," he rallied the shattered fragments of the Union Army and saved the honor of the nation's flag on the day of that great victory. (Applause).

And so with Lincoln. It was symbolical that the chosen leader in the greatest battle that had ever been waged for the freedom and the dignity of humanity in all the evolution of the ages, when it was finally to be decided whether men in truth and fact are equal before the law,—it was especially fitting and appropriate that the champion of the armies of liberty and humanity should be a plain man of the people, one of that unnumbered and nameless majority who in all the centuries of civilization have toiled that others might rest and sowed that others might reap.

### As Statesman and Lawyer.

And yet, my friends, he was no uncultured man. That person has read little of the truth of history who believes, as some men perhaps believe, that Abraham Lincoln was merely a prodigy, awkward and uncouth and that he was not skilled in the ways of men and states. In the long line of presidents of the United States there never has been one who was better equipped for the duties of his high office than was Abraham Lincoln. (Applause). He was a leading lawyer among the leading lawyers of the Republic and of the world. He had been trained from his youth by daily conflict and attrition with the leaders of the bar of the United States. In Illinois he was brought in daily contact with lawyers like Lyman Trumbull and David Davis, afterwards Justice of the

Supreme Court of the United States, and before their attack his banner was never lowered in disgrace or in dishonorable defeat.

As a member of the legislature of the great state of Illinois he had learned legislation, and had studied deeply policies of government. He had served with ability and distinction one term in the congress of the United States. He knew the history, the defenses, the resources, the barbarity of slavery better than any man who ever spoke the English tongue. And when from the prairies of Illinois he went to Washington to take his seat as President of the United States, when he gathered about him a cabinet of the great men of this land, Abraham Lincoln was easily the greatest of that Cabinet and he might well exclaim in the proud boast of the Scottish chief of old as they sat about the cabinet table, "The head of the table is where MacGregor sits."

(Applause.)

There were even statesmen and friends of Lincoln who underrated him in those days. It is interesting to read an incident which occurred almost immediately after the cabinet had been appointed. William H. Seward, statesman, scholar, diplomat and publicist, had been appointed Lincoln's Secretary of State. As I have said before, England and France, acting in indecent and brutal concert, recognized the belligerency of the southern states before Mr. Adams was able to reach London. Mr. Seward, acting in the proper discharge of the functions of his office as Secretary of State, submitted to Mr. Lincoln a dispatch which was intended to be handed to the British Minister of Foreign Affairs by Mr. Adams at London. Mr. Seward knew international law. He was a statesman of the old and polished school of the republic. He undoubtedly submitted the document to the president as a perfunctory and formal duty, expecting that it would be approved substantially as it was written. In Nicolay and Hay's life of Lincoln can be found this dispatch, dated in May, 1861, showing the changes which were made by Mr.

Lincoln in his own hand-writing, changes not only disclosing a knowledge of international law, but of the loftiest kind of politics and statesmanship; and we of today know that if the document had been delivered written as Mr. Seward wrote it, England would have declared war and France would have followed her example.

### As Commander in Chief.

Lincoln was not only a great lawyer and a great statesman, but he had qualifications which especially entitled him to be the commander in chief of the army of liberty. He was not a trained soldier. He was a man of peace. While still almost a boy he had served for some months in the Black Hawk War, and one of his most interesting and amusing addresses is one which he made in Congress giving his own military record. But he had physical and moral qualities which as a soldier endeared him to the rank and file of the Union Army. They were first of all proud of his reputation for feats of strength and physical prowess. Scholars and philosophers may talk to us and may reason with us, but there never will come a time in the history of this human race when manly strength and valor will not appeal to the human heart and fascinate the human mind. And around the camp-fires of the armies of the republic were told the stories of how Abraham Lincoln in the early days was the swiftest of foot, was the strongest of arm, was the most successful wrestler in all the forests and along all the rivers of Illinois. His strength and courage had been tested upon many an arena, and his soldiers enshrined his name in the memory of those deeds in the same way that the Crusaders of old amid Syrian sands and deserts and on the fields of Palestine sang the knightly feats and embalmed in immortal story the deeds of Richard, the Lion-Heart. And in an earlier day of American history, responsive to the same promptings of our nature, the soldiers of the Revolution loved to hear with bated breath and quickening heart how on the awful day of Brad-

dock's defeat and death George Washington, the stripling Colonel of the Virginia riflemen, beat back the scalping knife of the savage and saved the shattered fragments of a British army. But it was not only for these traits that Lincoln was personally beloved by the soldiers of the Union. There was not a soldier in the army who did not know that his president would not harm a single human being or a single living thing unless called upon to do so by the awful irony of fate under the awful impulse of duty. Every soldier knew that every rebel bullet that ever pierced a soldier's heart first went through the great heart of Abraham Lincoln.

### As Orator.

He was a great orator. It is accurate to say that no man ever spoke this English tongue of ours with greater force, with greater purity, with greater precision. He must have been a great orator, because for twenty years of the most crucial time of his life he stood in the arena against not only one of the greatest statesman of America, but one of the greatest orators of all time in the person of Stephen A. Douglas. And on this occasion let us not forget to place a wreath of gratitude and love upon the grave of Douglas. You know his history. If there was ever a man who was ambitious, it was Douglas. If there was ever a man who when the hour came for him to put the ambition of his life away and choose between his country and his personal fortunes,—if there was ever a man who made the decision without hesitation,—it was Stephen A. Douglas. He was defeated for the presidency by half a million of votes, by Abraham Lincoln. But the popular vote which he received was a half million only under Lincoln's vote, and was a half million greater than the vote received by Breckenridge, the candidate of the slavery wing of the Democratic party. But the moment that armed rebellion fired upon that flag (pointing to it) Stephen A. Douglas knew no party, knew no personal ambition. His first address rang upon the hearts and upon

the ears of millions in this great land of ours when he said: "From this time there can be only two classes in this great republic; in this war there can be no neutral; there are and there shall be only patriots and traitors." (Applause). Last week there was laid away in the hallowed grounds of yonder cemetery a brave soldier of the armies of the Union. Above his casket a detail from this organization fired its last parting salute, and never has that salute been fired over the grave of a braver soldier, a purer patriot, or a better citizen. One of the happiest and most interesting experiences of my life was when I heard from General Mark D. Flower how, when a stripling boy, about to take the cars at Springfield for the front, when he was on his way to defend this flag of ours, Stephen A. Douglas from his carriage, standing bare-headed in a driving rain addressed the volunteers exhorting them to do a man's and a patriot's duty, and as the years roll on and the acerbities and factional strife of a generation ago are softened in the calmness of history, as the name of Lincoln grows brighter, so with it shall grow brighter and dearer to the hearts of all the people of this land the name of Stephen A. Douglas. (Applause.)

Lincoln was not only a greater orator than was Douglas, but he was a greater orator than any of the other great orators of his time. You remember how Edward Everett was with him when that celebrated and immortal speech was delivered by Lincoln at Gettysburg—Everett the polished, cultivated scholar, the experienced public speaker, the man whose fame as an orator was known in every civilized land. Everett delivered a splendid, scholarly, eloquent oration on that day. But Lincoln's address, of some thirty or forty lines, will live when the name and the memory of Everett are forgotten, and it will live as long as this stately English language shall survive.

There is no finer passage in English prose than the concluding lines of Lincoln's second inaugural address:

"The Almighty has His own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that

offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern there any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

These, my friends, were some of the traits of the man whose name and fame we honor today. He was great in his life and surpassingly great in the opportuneness of his death. Never was there a more fitting climax to a life nobly and faithfully spent. When peace had been declared, when his mission had been accomplished, suddenly, and as by a thunder-bolt, Abraham Lincoln, in the very prime of health, usefulness and strength, was stricken down forever. Is it not almost the irony of fate—the grotesque irony of fate—that in this short history of the American republic three of our chief magistrates have died by the hand of an assassin? And the three who have thus died, the three who were thus chosen by the inscrutable decrees of Providence, were the three of all the presidents

who had the least of what men call malice, whose hearts were gentle and whose bosoms were overflowing with the milk of human kindness. Garfield, McKinley, Lincoln, a trinity of great and gentle men, by the inscrutable irony of fate, taken from their stage of life and usefulness as if to show to us the instability of human things.

We meet tonight to honor Lincoln's memory. His memory will be honored as long as there shall be left a vestige of civil government on the face of the earth; and in the years to come he will be honored because he was true to every sacred trust which was confided to him; because as a lawyer he was true to his clients; because as a legislator there was upon his garments no smell of corruption; because as the commander of a victorious army, as the champion of the holiest cause and the leader of the mightiest war ever chronicled in the history of civilization, amid scenes of blood and carnage he preserved the purity, the simplicity, the charity of a child. He will be honored because above all men who have ever lived he was true to the cause of human liberty; because, without ostentation, without bravado, without boasting and without swagger, quietly, solemnly, prayerfully, he met the responsibilities of his station and discharged them all. His was a sad and lonely life. He not only wept in the Garden of Olives, but he mounted the heights of Golgotha's holy hill of sacrifice. And if, in days to come, the honor of that flag shall be threatened, or the integrity of the nation shall be endangered, let us pray to Him who guides the affairs of men and of states that in that day there may be a president who will look back to earlier days and follow the example of him whose name we honor tonight, for, if he does, this "government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth." (Applause.)







